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Petrologic Aspects of Plate Tectonics

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The concept of plate tectonics has developed during the past four years from the hypotheses of continental drift and sea-floor spreading, supported by a variety of evidence from paleomagnetism, geochronology, and marine geology and geophysics. A series of four contiguous papers in the March 1968 issue of the *Journal of Geophysical Research* correlated on a global scale the linear magnetic anomalies, which are parallel to and bilaterally symmetrical about the oceanic ridge system, with the polarity reversals of the earth's magnetic field imprinted on new oceanic crust as it was generated at the oceanic ridge crests [Pitman et al., 1968; Dickson et al., 1968; Le Pichon and Heirtzler, 1968; Heirtzler et al., 1968]. In 1967 and 1968, four major papers introduced plate tectonics: the earth's surface is considered to be

made up of a few rigid crustal plates or blocks in motion relative to each other [McKenzie and Parker, 1967; Morgan, 1968; Le Pichon, 1968; Isacks et al., 1968].

Wilson's [1965] concept of transform faults was extended to a spherical surface by McKenzie and Parker and by Morgan. McKenzie and Parker outlined the elements of plate tectonics (paving-stone theory). Morgan formalized the concept, dividing the earth's surface into about twenty rigid plates. Le Pichon presented a global model with only six major plates. Plate boundaries are of three types: extensive oceanic ridges where new crust is generated, compressive oceanic trenches where crust is destroyed, and transform faults where crustal surface is neither created nor destroyed. Earthquake belts follow the boundaries to the series of essentially aseismic plates. There is now evidence for smaller plates moving relative to the larger plates around them, as in the Caribbean region [Molnar and Sykes, 1969]. In the fourth paper, Isacks, Oliver, and Sykes dealt specifically with the strong support given by seismological observations and interpretations to the concept of 'the new global tectonics.' Results obtained in Joides leg 3 across the mid-Atlantic ridge, reported by Maxwell and seven co-authors [Maxwell et al., 1970], provide striking evidence in support of the model.

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I started to survey the literature journal by journal for the past four years, but since the plate-tectonics revolution was announced [Wilson, 1968; Belousov, 1968] so many papers include reference to plate tectonics that I abandoned this procedure. This report relies heavily on recent review papers that provide entrance into the earlier literature of this four-year period.

The concept of plate tectonics is forcing geologists to reconsider everything that they thought they knew about geology. A Penrose Conference of the Geological Society of America convened in December 1969 to discuss 'The Meaning of the New Global Tectonics for Magmatism, Sedimentation, and Metamorphism in Orogenic Belts.' Dickinson [1970] published a report of the meeting. The topics that received particular attention included (1) andesite chains, (2) batholith belts, (3) ophiolite complexes, (4) blueschist metamorphism, (5) relationship of continental structures to subduction zones beneath island arcs and continental margins, and (6) the meaning of geosynclinal theory in the new conceptual framework. A review paper by Dewey and Bird [1970] on 'Mountain Belts and the New Global Tectonics' outlined in some detail many of the geological and petrological aspects of plate tectonics, with particular attention to the compressive plate boundaries. The topics listed above, and other petrological aspects of plate tectonics, can be considered with respect to (1) oceanic ridges and associated transform fracture zones, (2) island arcs and continental margins associated with oceanic trenches, and (3) the rigid plates.

The temperature distribution at depth is one fundamental control on petrological processes. Estimates of temperature vary greatly, depending on the assumptions regarding the significance for heat transfer of conduction, radiation, and convection. At 500-km depth there is a difference of about 1000°C between estimated geotherms for a conduction model [Lubimova, 1967] and for a convection model [Tozer, 1967]. Other estimates involving conduction and radiation lie between these limits.

According to plate tectonics, temperatures beneath oceanic ridges are high because of rising mantle material. Oxburgh and Turcotte [1968] presented a steady-state distribution of isotherms beneath an oceanic ridge, computed on the basis of boundary-layer theory, and assuming constant viscosity independent of temperature (see also Turcotte and Oxburgh, 1969). An alternative to this model of broad upwelling is the injection of dykes from the low-velocity zone into a narrow axial zone [McKenzie, 1967; Sleep, 1969].

A sinking slab of lithosphere in a subduction zone extending downward from an oceanic trench lowers mantle temperatures, but heat may be generated around the margins of the cold slab as it moves through the mantle. The distribution of geotherms beneath island arcs and continental margins has been calculated or illustrated by McKenzie [1969], McBirney [1969], Minear and Toksöz [1970], and Oxburgh and Turcotte [1970].

Deformation experiments on peridotite and dunite suggest that flow in the upper mantle may be governed

by a nonlinear creep law [Carter and Ave Lallemant, 1970] and the fabric produced experimentally by syntectonic recrystallization of olivine is similar to fabrics in some ultramafic nodules derived from the mantle [Ave Lallemant and Carter, 1970]. This has implications for seismic anisotropy of the upper mantle.

Much has been learned about the structure and petrology of the oceanic ridges in recent years. According to van Andel [1968], an original terrane of fissure-erupted basalts is subsequently deformed by faulting, rifting, and uplift. Melson *et al.*, [1968] referred to three types of topography: linear topography, cross-fracture zones, and regions with abundant volcanoes. Fissure eruptions dominate, with abyssal tholeiites or their metamorphosed equivalents commonly dredged from the ridge crests [Melson and van Andel, 1966]. Peridotites, serpentinites, and gabbros occur in the fracture zones, and alkali olivine basalts are dredged from the upper flanks of volcanoes [van Andel *et al.*, 1967; Melson *et al.*, 1968]. There appear to be correlations between petrology and relief. Menard [1967] suggested that the volume of lava discharged at the ridge into layer 2, per unit time per unit length, is relatively constant regardless of the spreading rate.

The chemistry and mineralogy of basalts dredged from the ridges has been described by Aumento [1967, 1968], Melson *et al.*, [1968], McBirney and Gass [1967], Miyashiro *et al.* [1969a, 1970a, b], Gast [1968], Frey *et al.* [1968] and Kay *et al.* [1970]. Differentiation products have been described by Miyashiro *et al.* [1970b] and Aumento [1969]. Aumento [1969] described in situ diorites associated with basalts and serpentinites on fault scarps. Aumento [1967, 1968] and McBirney and Gass [1967] discussed variations in basalt composition with distance from ridge crest and depth of eruption, a topic pursued in many subsequent papers. Melson and Thompson [1970] described gabbroic cumulates dredged from the Romanche fracture zone, and cited this as evidence for the existence of layered basic complexes in the oceanic crust. Engel and Fisher [1969] reported anorthosite from the mid-Indian Ocean ridge.

Peridotites, serpentinites, and other plutonic rocks appear to floor the cross-fracture zones [van Andel *et al.*, 1967]. The amphibole-bearing mylonite peridotites and associated alkalic ultrabasic rocks of St. Paul's Rocks above the mid-Atlantic ridge were described by Melson *et al.* [1967] and Frey [1970]. Engel and Fisher [1969] described lherzolites from cross fractures in the mid-Indian Ocean ridge and noted their chemical similarity to the St. Paul's Rocks peridotites. Miyashiro *et al.* [1969b] reported a detailed study of serpentinites from the mid-Atlantic ridge and concluded that these, too, were chemically similar to the St. Paul's Rocks. Vine and Hess [1970] reviewed the distribution of peridotites and serpentinites in the oceans.

Melson and van Andel [1966] described greenstones from the ridge crest that had apparently been metamorphosed beneath an overburden of about 2 km at a temperature of about 300°C. Metamorphosed basalts and gabbros have since been reported by many investigators, including Melson *et al.* [1968], Miyashiro *et al.*

[1969a, 1970a]. Hot, possibly saline solutions may be involved in the metamorphism. The metamorphosed rocks are exposed in fault scarps. *Christensen* [1970] concluded that seismic velocities in the lower oceanic crust were consistent with the presence of abundant greenschists. Grossular garnet is a minor component in some dredged lherzolites [*Engel and Fisher*, 1969] and andradite garnets have been found in serpentinized peridotite [*Switzer et al.*, 1970].

The magnetic properties of the ridge and its flanks are controlled by the petrology. *Phillips et al.* [1969] reported a narrow fracture zone near 43°N across the mid-Atlantic ridge, which appeared to separate a northern region floored by serpentinized peridotites from a southern region floored by basalts. The northern region had no central rift, no obvious magnetic symmetry elements, and high heat flow. The southern region had a well-developed rift and symmetrical magnetic anomaly pattern, both terminating abruptly at the fracture zone, and low heat flow. The state of magnetization of submarine basalts and the causes of magnetic anomalies in oceanic crustal material are not adequately known [*Watkins and Richardson*, 1968]. Magnetic studies of basalts dredged from the ocean have been reported by *Ozima et al.* [1968] and *de Boer et al.* [1969]. *Miyashiro et al.* [1970a] suggested that the magnetic anomalies were caused by a superficial layer of strongly magnetized basalt overlying rocks that had lost their magnetic properties through metamorphism.

Models for the generation of new crust at the oceanic ridges involve the petrology of the basalts and peridotites, and their metamorphosed equivalents. *Aumento* [1967] proposed a model relating a variety of magma types to structures and dynamic processes associated with the ridges, and *Gast* [1968] proposed a similar, more quantitative model based on the convection scheme of *Oxburgh and Turcotte* [1968]. *Kay et al.* [1970] extended these discussions further. Alternative interpretations of the petrology giving different models for sea-floor spreading were considered by *Miyashiro et al.* [1970a]. *Vogt et al.* [1969] reviewed petrological models. *Melson and Thompson* [1970] reviewed four processes involved in the formation of oceanic crust, including the development of layered basic complexes. *Thayer* [1969] suggested that the peridotite-gabbro complexes of orogenic belts may provide the key to interpretation of the petrology of mid-oceanic ridges. *Dewey and Bird* [1970] suggested that the ophiolite complexes of orogenic belts represent upper mantle and oceanic crust generated at oceanic ridge systems, translated laterally by sea-floor spreading, and incorporated tectonically at low temperatures into orogenic belts.

Murray [1970] pointed out that the alkalic volcanic activity associated with African rift valleys since pre-Cenozoic time opposes the concept that they represent an embryonic stage of the spreading process. The volcanism differs significantly, in composition and volume, from that at oceanic ridges.

Petrological aspects of plate tectonics at compressive plate junctures, island arcs, and active continental margins, include interpretation of ophiolites and other

ultramafic rocks of the orogenic belts, the conditions for metamorphism, and the possible involvement of oceanic sediments in subduction zones, the origin of andesites and high-alumina basalts, and the origin of batholiths.

Recent opinions about the origin of ophiolites and other orogenic ultramafic rocks have been reviewed by *Wyllie* [1970]. *Thayer* [1969] discussed their relationship to oceanic ridges and the oceanic crust. *Dewey and Bird* [1970] emphasized the fundamental importance of the ophiolite suite in evaluating the stages of development of mountain belts. *Hamilton* [1969], *Gresens* [1970], and *Moiseyev* [1970] discussed the origin of serpentinites in connection with a former subduction zone dipping beneath California.

Dewey and Bird [1970] and *Oxburgh and Turcotte* [1970] illustrated schematically how blueschist metamorphism could be caused by rapid plate consumption. It is generally assumed that some sediment is carried down into the mantle with the sinking oceanic plate, and that some of it is mechanically plastered by folding onto the continental margin or island arc. There has been considerable discussion about the behavior of sediments in oceanic trenches, because many of them show only tensional features, whereas compressional deformation is expected from plate tectonic theory. The problem is complex, and it has been reviewed recently by *Scholl et al.* [1970]. The blueschists of the California Coast Ranges have been interpreted in terms of underflow of the Pacific mantle plate along a Benioff zone during the Mesozoic by *Hamilton* [1969] and *Ernst* [1970]; see also *Page* [1970]. *Gresens* [1970] accepted underthrusting for this region, but he interpreted the blueschists as metastable rocks formed by fluids generated during serpentinization.

The origin of andesites and other volcanic rocks of the calc-alkalic suite by partial fusion of sediments and crust of a downgoing slab of oceanic lithosphere has been reviewed in general terms by *Dewey and Bird* [1970] and *Oxburgh and Turcotte* [1970]. It has been established by *Dickinson and Hatherton* [1967], *Dickinson* [1968], and *Hatherton and Dickinson* [1969] that the ratio K_2O/SiO_2 in andesites from circum-Pacific and other island arcs increases in transverse direction across the arc from the ocean. The K_2O content of the lavas is closely correlated with the depth from the volcanoes to the inclined seismic zones beneath the arcs. The authors place the source of the andesite magmas in the sinking slab, at depths of 100 to 300 km. Similar chemical variations appear to exist in batholiths; they have been established for the Sierra Nevada batholith [*Bateman and Dodge*, 1970]. *Raleigh and Lee* [1969] illustrated descending oceanic lithosphere, with successive dehydration reactions occurring as oceanic crust was converted from serpentinite and basalt to peridotite and blueschist, and the blueschist was converted to amphibolite and eclogite; andesite formed by partial fusion of the eclogite at depth. Dehydration of the lithosphere slab, followed by upward migration of water into the warmer overlying mantle, could produce partial fusion as proposed by *McBirney* [1969] and *Hamilton* [1969]. This process has been postulated as a source of inter-

mediate and acid magmas for andesites and for batholiths. Metamorphism associated with this part of the island arc is presumably of the moderate-pressure/high-temperature type, in contrast with the high-pressure/low-temperature type producing blueschists in the trench region.

The application of plate tectonic theory to the Mesozoic evolution of western North America by Hamilton [1969], by Gilluly *et al.* [1970], and by Ernst [1970] introduced a number of petrological interpretations. Bird and Dewey [1970] applied plate tectonic theory, with petrological interpretations, to the evolution of the Appalachian Caledonian orogenic belt. Ziegler [1970] unraveled the geosynclinal development of the British Isles during the Silurian, in terms of plate tectonic theory. He concluded that the Atlantic Ocean was open during the Lower Paleozoic, closed, and reopened in the Mesozoic along a slightly different line. Hamilton [1970] reviewed the geology and the igneous and metamorphic petrology of the Uralides between the Russian and Siberian platforms, and deduced a history of continental margins before and during the collisions of these two plates, assumed originally to have been separated.

The eruption of lava above a rigid plate, far removed from plate boundaries, does not fit neatly into plate tectonic schemes. There is evidence that volcanoes formed in plates also drift. Menard [1969] reviewed the growth of drifting volcanoes.

Some petrological observations appear only on predrift continental reconstructions [Bullard *et al.*, 1965; Dietz and Holden, 1970]. Herz [1969] noted continuity of ancient anorthosite belts. Hurley [1970] noted that the distribution of age provinces in Laurasia is vaguely concentric, with increasingly younger mobile belts disposed peripherally around an inner ring of ancient cratons.

Plate tectonics has enjoyed such phenomenal success as a working hypothesis that it is fast becoming a ruling theory. The model provides a framework for the interpretation of petrology in various environments. On the other hand, petrology provides information that can be used to support the models. It is obviously necessary to guard against circular arguments. The international Upper Mantle Project terminated in 1970. It is replaced by a Geodynamics Project, and this international, interdisciplinary program will continue to make petrology, geochemistry, and geophysics mutually dependent on each other.

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